

## PHONETIC INTERFERENCE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE IN THE GENERAL AMERICAN ENGLISH UTTERANCES OF FILIPINO LEARNERS

MARCELINA S. DEIPARINE

*Cebu Technological University-Argao, Cebu, Philippines*

### ABSTRACT

*This study suspected that native language interfered in the General American English speech of Southern Cebuano English language learners. Thus, this studied the native language phonetic interference in the second-language speech in General American English. It centered on how the Southern Cebuano Visayan segmental phonemes interfere with the utterances of the respondents. It used the qualitative analytical method where the respondents were tasked to read several words taken from the book of Harrington published in 2010 - Phonetic Analysis of Speech Corpora. Errors in the sound articulation certainly pointed the interference. This investigation exposed that Cebuano Visayan segmental phonemes /a/, /i/, and /u/ interfered with the articulation of General American English Segmental phonemes; the Cebuano Visayan consonant plosives interfered the General American English fricatives; all were interfered only in terms of aspiration for clusters; and the old habit in the L1 of reading a word as how they are spelled. Hence, it was recommended that anyone teaching English language in Southern Cebu may determine the existence of segmental-phoneme interference in the General American English utterances of learners, contrast the Cebuano Visayan and General American English, and plot some activities intended to establish an efficient phonetic articulation in English*

**KEYWORDS:** *Language, Segmental, Phoneme, Interference, Speech*

**Received:** Mar 23, 2022; **Accepted:** Apr 13, 2022; **Published:** Apr 26, 2022; **Paper Id:** IJELJUN202210

### INTRODUCTION

There are distinct segmental features of Cebuano-Visayan language, and it is suspected that the distinct segmental interference of speech sounds of Cebuano-Visayan language as spoken specifically in the town of Argao in Southern Cebu Philippines would interfere in Cebuano learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) speech in General American English (GAE) (ESL). It has also been directly noticed that even Argao students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in English degree face language interruption while they work to improve their English language skills. Because of the structure of the Cebuano-Visayan language, it is assumed that such interference is largely phonemic rather than prosodic. Regardless of this, research related to Cebuano-Visayan Language interference only focuses on prosodic factors and not on phonetic, reason why this research was conducted.

As a result, English classes are an important and necessary part of university education. Educators in the academic setting use a variety of steps to improve the effectiveness of English language usage. This is because English is now considered the global language; and because man is innately seeking a greater range of options, he strives to master a language that is understood by people from all over the world. The English language is now interchangeable with things, capital, people, knowledge, images, communications, fads, and beliefs that traverse national borders. As a result, language differs between various groups or even among the same speakers in different situations (Parker and Riley, 2005).

Anchored on these facts, this study investigated the first language segmental-phoneme interference by AB English in Argao in the second language speech in General American English. It specifically dealt answered on (1) How do the three Cebuano Visayan or vowel phonemes of /i/, /a/, /u/ interfere with the General American English? and (2) How do the Cebuano Visayan consonants interfere with the General American English?

In an appropriate environment, young learners can easily learn to use a target language with the efficiency of a native speaker; full grown cannot. When learners of the target language want to express, they tend to scaffold the target language with the first language structures. If the structures are not the same, it means that several errors may be present thus indicating an interference of the first language in the second language (Decherts & Dllis, as qtd. in Derakhshan and Karimi, 2015).

In the Philippine context, the industry places college graduates with English language-related qualifications and a high level of communication skills considered to reflect their high awareness. However, there are negative judgments and social bias that some may have about unusual forms. Unusual variations of language as used in real communication situations are inevitable due to certain linguistic differences. Language varies between different groups or speakers of different situations (Parker and Riley, 2005). A negative attitude towards new language forms is often since these new approaches are introduced by lesser-known speakers in the community (Baker and Hengeveld, 2012). Linguistic diversity may cause disruption in the use of General American English. Foronda (2017) pointed out that interference is one of the most important problems students face in a second language. The different standards of our native language hinder us in some way from finding another set of rules in a second language.

## RELATED LITERATURES

Various research projects in the subject topic are being carried out in India. In English and Oriya, a study was done to determine the relationship between reading and phonological awareness. The evidence suggests that areas influence cross-language transfer and phonological awareness facilitation in learning to read. First, the features of the various orthographies of the languages learnt; second, whether the first language learned is also the first spoken language (Mishra and Stainthorp, cited in Avaniika, et.al, 2009).

It is less clear that language is rule-governed because no one explicitly teaches someone how to talk. A non-linguist may not notice any rules in the creation of words like stick, talked, or skid. Certainly, a non-linguist, for example, would not be seeking for such a rule. Based on these and comparable terms, the linguist might define that in English, any fricative at the beginning of a word followed by a voiceless stop must be voiceless. Other phonological rules describe the system for combining different sound sequences. They specify if things should be added, deleted, or changed in an idealized form to make it simpler to say or comprehend (Rowe and Levine 79). The native language has an impact on second language learning. The appropriate language structure is produced, and positive transfer occurs when the structural patterns of both languages are indistinguishable. If errors occur as a result of such a transfer, they are referred to as interference or negative interference.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative linguistic study utilized the descriptive phonemic analytical method of research in order to delineate the first language interference on the second language production of segmental phonemes: Cebuano Visayan vis-à-vis General

American English among learners in Cebu Technological University-Argao Campus which is situated approximately 67 kilometers South of Cebu City.

This study utilized purposive sampling technique since the intended output was to produce a monograph about segmental interference which was argued to be of great benefit to the faculty, the students, and the academic institution. The phonetic interference of L1 and the L2 segmental phonemes is determined through the oral reading of one hundred thirty-five words (three mostly monosyllabic words for each segmental phoneme): Forty-two words for the 11 vowels and 3 diphthongs, 93 words for the 24 consonants and 5 clusters and 2 syllabic consonants. The words are taken from the book of Harrington published in 2010 "Phonetic Analysis of Speech Corpora".

The phonetic errors in the mispronunciations of the segmental phonemes contained in the words definitely point to the L1 interferences in L2 oral production of the words. The PCLS-IPA version of phonetic symbols listed below with sample GAE lexemes is used. Participants of this study were the twenty-seven first year AB-English Students enrolled in the Phonology and Morphology of English Subject. They are believed to be the best participant for this study as this study is directly beneficial to students learning Phonology of English.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The interferences of CV (Cebuano-Visayan) vowel and consonant phonemes on the oral production of General American English (GAE) vowel and consonant phonemes are tabulated below.

**Table 1: Front-Vowel Interferences**

GAE Front Vowels	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Front-Vowel Interference
/iy/	Steel	/stiyl/	/stiyl/	-
/I/	It	/It/	/iyt/	/iy/
/ey/	Great	/greyt/	/griyt/	/iy/
/ε/	Hair	/her/	/heyr/	/ey/
/æ/	Back	/bæk/	/bak/	/a/

As reflected in the table for Front Vowel Interferences, the CV vowel phoneme /iy/ does not interfere in the General American English speech of the participants. There is no negative transfer since this phoneme is also the sole front- vowel used in CV like in the words 'ilis' (change) and 'likit' (roll). However, the vowel phonemes /I/ which is not used in CV is interfered. The phoneme /I/ is erroneously pronounced as phoneme /iy/. Moreover, the vowel phonemes /ey/ and /ε/ are also occasionally interfered by the Cebuano phoneme /iy/. Interference occurs because the phonemes /I/, / ey / and / ε / are also positioned relatively in front in the mouth without creating a constriction, made with the tongue raised towards the hard palate, and all are also produced unrounded like the vowel phoneme /iy/. An extensive spreading of the lips led by old habit in the CV changes the sounds of these phonemes to the sound of the phoneme /iy/. There are but rare cases that the phoneme /ε/ is pronounced as /iy/ and participants as observed swiftly rectify the error. There are also cases that this phoneme /ε/ is mispronounced when the participant is deceived by the spelling of the word as in CV, words are often pronounced as how they are spelled. A sample is reflected on the table. The phoneme /ε/ in the word 'hair' is pronounced as 'ey'. The same with words though not listed above, 'share' and 'care'. In this case, still there is no negative transfer happening. Lastly, the CV vowelphoneme /a/ interfered the GAE phoneme /æ/. This is because words in CV with letter 'a' in spelling are all pronounced as /a/ and never as /æ/. These results imply that language interference of CV to the

GAE speech is due to some contrasts of these languages. It agrees with Parker and Riley (2005) as they stated that language varies among different groups or the same speakers of different situation (Parker and Riley, 2005). Moreover, it also conforms to Pesirla's (2003) academic paper titled A Pedagogic Grammar for Cebuano-Visayan contention that Cebuano-Visayan phonology contains only three vowel phonemes which are front-vowel /i/ ; /IIs/ (*change*), center-vowel /a/; /bana/ (*husband*) and back vowel /u/ ; /ulu/ (*head*). This finding had activated contentions that in the process of acquiring English Language, Cebuanos may encounter conflict in word utterances due to the restricted vowel sound their language hold.

**Table 2: Center-Vowel Interferences**

GAE Center Vowels	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Center-Vowel Interference
/a/	Cart	/kart/	/kart/	-
/ə/	But	/bət/	/bat/	/a/

As reflected in the table for Center-Vowel Interferences, the vowel phoneme /a/ is not interfered because it has similar characteristics with the sole center-vowel of CV like in the words 'mata' (eye) and 'bana' (husband). However, the phoneme /ə/ or the schwa sound of the General American English is evidently interfered with the phoneme /a/ of CV because schwa is a distinct phoneme of the General American English which is quick and relaxed, unlike any phonemes of CV that are comprehensively emphasized in a speech. These results imply that the more distinct is the feature of the GAE from the CV; negative transfer is more likely to occur. This upholds the idea of Mu'in (2017) where she had magnified in her study that the greater the variation of the native language and the target language, the bigger possibility of language interferences.

**Table 3: Back-Vowel Interferences**

GAE Back-Vowels	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Back-Vowel Interference
/ɔ/	thought	/thot/	/tɔt/	-
/ow/	hoe	/how/	/huw/	/uw/
/o/	book	/bok/	/buwk/	/uw/
/uw/	do	/duw/	/duw/	-

As reflected in the table for Back-Vowel Interferences, the vowel phoneme /ɔ/ is not interfered by any features of CV vowel phonemes since this is also a very distinct lax phoneme for GAE. Moreover, the vowel phoneme /ow/ is occasionally and less interfered than vowel phoneme /o/ by the CV vowel phoneme /u/. Aside from language interference, this is also due to the fact that the given words 'took', 'hood', and 'book' are having double 'o's which led them to use the stiff and prolonged sound of /uw/ as they used the stiff and prolonged sound of the vowel phoneme /iy/ when the words are having double 'e's like in the words 'steel' and 'meet'. Lastly for Back Vowels, the vowel phoneme /uw/ is not interfered as this phoneme is also the sole back-vowel phoneme of CV like in the words 'atu' (ours) and 'mubu' (short). These results imply that EFL learners in Cebu experience learning a language other than their mother tongue as harder and more demanding than learning the CV since its features itself will interfere in the learning of the second language. This agrees with Baker and Hengeveld's (2012) contention that learning a second language when they are older is a hard slog. And still, despite years of dedicated study, they may still not get close to the proficiency of a native speaker.

**Table 4: Diphthong Interferences**

GAE Diphthongs	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Diphthong Interference
/aw/	how	/haw/	/haw/	-
/ay/	ride	/rayd/	/rayd/	-
/oy/	toy	/toy/	/tuy/	/uy/

As reflected in the table for Diphthong Interferences, the diphthong phoneme /aw/ and /ay/ are not interfered simply because these two diphthongs are very present in CV like in the words ‘ikaw’ (you) and ‘hikay’ (cook). However, the diphthong phoneme /oy/ is often interfered by the CV phoneme /uy/ like in the words ‘kahuy’ (tree) and ‘kapuy’ (tiresome). These results imply that the established phonemic features of the CV have an impact on producing the phonemes of the GAE. This upholds the idea of Foronda (2017) on interference as he defined it as the errors that can be traced back to the first language, while the learners use the second language.

**Table 5: Stops Interferences**

GAE Stops	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Stops Interferences
/p/	pie	/p <sup>h</sup> ay/	/pay/	/p/
/b/	boy	/b <sup>h</sup> oy/	/buy/	/b/
/t/	tap	/t <sup>h</sup> æp/	/tap/	/t/
/d/	dot	/d <sup>h</sup> at/	/dat/	/d/
/k/	cat	/k <sup>h</sup> æt/	/at/	/k/
/g/	gut	/g <sup>h</sup> æt/	/gat/	/g/

As reflected in the table for Stops Interferences, all are interfered in terms of aspiration which is symbolized by ‘h’ in detailed GAE language transcription. In the GAE, there could be two or more variants of the same phoneme like the aspirated /p<sup>h</sup>/ of ‘pie’ and the unaspirated ‘p’ of spin. These variants are called allophones and these are only used in the General American English. There are no variants of the same phoneme in CV and this is the main reason of stops interferences.

This result implies that some standards of the GAE hinder EFL learners of Cebu in achieving a GAE near-native proficiency. This supports Foronda’s (2017) argument that different standards of native language hinder one in some way in acquiring another set of rules from the second language.

**Table 6: Fricatives Interferences**

GAE Fricatives	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Fricatives Interferences
/f/	Fit	/fIt/	/fit/	f
/v/	Vat	/væt/	/vat/	v
/th/	Think	/thInk/	/think/	t
/ðh/	this	/ðhIs/	/ðhis/	d
/s/	side	/sayd/	/sayd/	-
/z/	zoo	/zuw/	/suw/	/s/
/sh/	ship	/ship/	/shiyp/	-
/zh/	azure	/æzhuwr/	/æshuwr/	/sh/
/h/	hair	/her/	/heyr/	-

As reflected in the table for Fricative Interferences, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ which are not used in the CV are occasionally interfered by the /p/ and /b/ phonemes of CV respectively. Moreover, these are also mostly produced like a half-baked /f/ and /v/ as the participants abruptly and lifelessly released air out of their mouth through a narrow opening made using the lower lip and the upper teeth instead of putting ample force to emphasize the frictional characteristic of these phonemes. Furthermore, the phonemes /th/ and /ðh/ which are also not used in CV are mostly interfered by the phonemes /t/ and /d/ of CV. Interference is also triggered by the fact that the phonemes /th/ and /ðh/ which are supposed to be placed between upper and lower teeth are often misplaced alveolar ridge which is quite close to the teeth. This leads to the production of the sounds of the phonemes /t/ and /d/. Moreover, the phonemes /s/ is not interfered since this has the same features with the phoneme /s/ in CV; however, the phoneme /z/ is interfered by the phoneme /s/ since the CV does not contain the phoneme /z/. For the case of the words ‘these’ and ‘was’, interference is triggered by the spelling since in CV, a word is read as it is spelled. The same way around with the phoneme /sh/ and /zh/ where the former is not interfered since this phoneme is a CV cluster like in the words ‘syumuy’ (traditional game), and the contraction of siya ‘s’ya’ (he/she); while the latter is often interfered by the former since the CV does not contain a /zh/ phoneme. Lastly, the phoneme /h/ is rarely interfered in terms of aspiration also as the participants abruptly and lifelessly released air out of their mouth through a wide opening made using the glottal area instead of putting ample force to emphasize its frictional characteristic. These results imply that when the participant desire to speak GAE, they tend to scaffold it with the CV structures. It conforms to the contention of Decherts&Dillis, qtd. in Derakhshan and Karimi (2015) that if the structures are unlike, then a number of errors may occur thus this indicates an interference of first language on second language.

**Table 7: Cluster Interferences**

GAE Clusters	Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	GAE Interferences
b-r	break	/b <sup>h</sup> reyk/	/breyk/	/b-r/
p-r	price	/p <sup>h</sup> rays/	/prays/	/p-r/
g-r	great	/g <sup>h</sup> reyt/	/greyt/	/g-r/
k-r	crow	/k <sup>h</sup> raw/	/kraw/	/k-r/
s-k-r	scratch	/skr <sup>h</sup> ætch/	/skratch/	/k-r/

As reflected in the table for Cluster Interferences, all are interfered in terms of aspiration. As aforementioned, there could be two or more variants of the same phoneme in the GAE like the aspirated /b<sup>h</sup>/ of ‘brake’ and the unaspirated /b/ of ‘rob’. These variants are called allophones and these are only used in the GAE. There are no variants of the same phoneme in CV and this is the main reason of cluster interferences.

This result implies that a single variation in the phonemic rules of CV and GAE can make the CV extensively distinguishable from the GAE. It upholds the implication of Avaniika (2009) that interference which is yield from the old practice or the first language habit must be unlearned before a native-like proficiency can be achieved.

**Table 8: Syllabic Consonants Interferences**

Syllabic Consonants	Sample Key Words	GAE Pronunciation	CV Pronunciation	Syllabic Consonants Interference
/n/	frightened	/fraytn/	/fraytən/	/ɛ/
/m/	bottom	/bætɪn/	/bætəm/	/ʊ/

As reflected in the table for syllabic consonants interferences, the phonemes /n/ and /m/ are interfered as the participants still produced the sound of the preceding vowel. The participants tend to pronounce the word as they are spelled, the same practice in CV. This result implies that it is hard to transfer phonemic rules from CV to GAE if these languages varied greatly from each other; that if one could not overcome, interference occur. This supports the claim of Allard (2011) as he expounds that if one language is closely linked with the other language, it is easier to decode information from L1 to L2, but if the two languages are not closely related with each other, greater language interference will occur.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis and findings of the study, it is concluded that Cebuano Visayan segmental phonemes as spoken by AB English students in Argao interfere with the production of General American English Segmental phonemes. For the General American English front vowels, the phonemes /I/ /ey/ and /ε/ is interfered by the Cebuano Visayan vowel phoneme /iy/. The phoneme / æ/ is interfered by the CV vowel phoneme /a/. Moreover, for the GAE center vowels, the phoneme /a/ is not interfered; however, phoneme/ə/ is interfered by the CV vowel phoneme /a/. Furthermore, for the GAE back vowels, the phoneme /ɔ/ is not interfered by any features of CV vowel phonemes; likewise, with the phoneme /uw/. However, the phonemes /ow/ and /ʊ/ are interfered by the CV vowel phoneme /uw/. Lastly, for GAE diphthongs, the phonemes /aw/ and /ay/ are not interfered as it shares the same feature with the CV diphthongs /aw/ and /ay/. However, the diphthong /oy/ is interfered by the CV diphthong /uy/. The Cebuano Visayan consonants interfere with the General American English stop consonants phonemes in terms of aspiration which is symbolized by ‘h’ in phonetic transcription. Moreover, for fricatives, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ which are absent categories in the CV are occasionally interfered by the CV phonemes /p/ and /b/ respectively. Moreover, these are also mostly produced like a half-baked /f/ and /v/. The phonemes /th/ and /dh/ are mostly interfered by the CV phonemes /t/ and /d/. On the other hand, the phonemes /s/ is not interfered; however, the phoneme /z/ is interfered by the phoneme /s/; the same way around with the phoneme /sh/ and /zh/ where the former is not interfered while the latter is often interfered by the former. Lastly, the phoneme /h/ is rarely interfered in terms of aspiration. Furthermore, none of the phonemes is interfered for affricates, nasals, liquids, and glides. For cluster, all are interfered only in terms of aspiration. However, the syllabic consonants are interfered by the old habit in the L1 of reading a word as how they are spelled.

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